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# The SMITH HILL REPORT



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February 10, 2025

## WEP / GPO Celebration

On Monday, February 3, the labor movement hosted a celebration with all four Rhode Island federal elected officials to mark the passage of the Social Security Fairness Act. Senator Jack Reed, Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, Congressman Seth Magaziner and Congressman Gabe Amo all attended the event. All four supported the measure, which assisted approximately 3 million public sector retirees who have had social security benefits reduced because of the Government Pension Offset (GPO) and the Windfall Elimination Program (WEP). These provisions, now repealed, penalized teachers, police officers, firefighters and other public sector workers who did not participate in social security.



RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro spoke at the event, noting the decades of advocacy that preceded passage of the bill. She thanked all four elected officials and urged them to work to get the bill implemented as soon as possible. President Calabro said “Today, we stand united in this victory, honoring the countless hours of advocacy, resilience, and unwavering determination it took to repeal the WEP/GPO legislation. This journey has been long, but together, we've fought for fairness and justice for every worker who dedicated their life to public service. Our success is a testament to the strength of solidarity and the belief that when we stand together, we can change the course of history!”

## **Threats Against School Officials – Felony**

On Tuesday, February 4, the RIFTHP offered [written testimony](#) in support of legislation that would make threats against school superintendents and other school staff a felony. The bill is intended to protect public school officials, including teachers, from threats of death or bodily harm. The bill passed the House last session, only to die in the Senate. In introducing the bill to the House Judiciary Committee, bill sponsor Representative Thomas Noret indicated that he would be crafting an amendment to limit the scope of the bill to adults. This offer was in response to criticism the bill received last session because some objected to creating a felony for threats uttered by students.

RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi offered written testimony in support of the bill, [H 5262](#). In his letter, he offered support of legislation that would serve as a deterrent to threats against school officials and teachers. While the bill was introduced at the behest of school superintendents, Parisi thanked the bill sponsor for wording the bill to protect all school employees. The Committee voted to hold the bill for further study.

## **ERSRI Funding Diversion**

At two separate bill hearings, the RIFTHP voiced objection to a proposal by Governor McKee that would divert over \$20 million in state funding away from the Employees Retirement System of Rhode Island to fund other state programs. Under a recent law, 50% of surplus receipts at the close of a fiscal year are deposited to a supplemental rainy day account. The other 50% of the surplus is deposited as a supplemental funding stream to the pension fund. [Article 2, Section 3](#) of the budget suspends this supplemental ERSRI funding for one fiscal year. It would divert \$21.6 million in supplemental pension funding this year.

RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi testified against the proposal in the Senate Finance Committee on Tuesday, February 4, and again testified against the proposal in the House Finance Committee on Thursday February 6. In his testimony, Parisi reminded the two Finance Committees that public sector workers lost billions of dollars in pension benefits in recent years. He testified that pension improvement for active workers (such as the Rule of 90) or COLA restoration for those retired after June 2012 rely on a well-funded pension plan. Diverting required pension funding, even for one year, could delay COLA restoration for retirees and will be an impediment for pension improvement for active workers. Parisi voiced strong objection to the proposals in both Committees. Joining the RIFTHP in opposing the measure was the RI AFL-CIO, AFSCME Council 94, the RI State Association of Firefighter, and the International Brotherhood of Police Officers.

## Warwick Public Schools Budget Commission

Darlene Netcoh, President of the Warwick Teachers Union, testified against the creation of a Warwick Public Schools Budget Commission in a hearing in the House Education Committee on February 6. She joined the School Committee Chair, the Superintendent, and the union representing school support staff in opposing the measure. The bill was supported by Warwick Mayor Frank Picozzi and has the support of the City Council.



[H 5252](#) by Representative McNamara was initiated by the Mayor after a significant school budget deficit was revealed in December. The School Committee has already reduced the projected \$9 million deficit by about \$3 million, with other reduction measures scheduled to be considered this month. President Netcoh testified that the creation of this budget commission was “premature.” She also highlighted that creation of a budget commission so rapidly while the deficit is being managed sets a bad precedent for other communities. To view her written testimony [click here](#). The Committee voted to hold the bill for further study.

### This Week

- The House Finance Committee will consider the Education Budget Article on Wednesday
- The House Labor Committee will consider legislation to protect bargaining rights for student employees if not protected by the NLRB on Wednesday
- The House State Government and Elections Committee will consider legislation about school committee meeting agendas on Wednesday, February 12th

## Bill Introductions

### **Science and Technology Curriculum Materials Extension**

([H 5163](#), McNamara, House Education)

This bill directs all local education agencies to select one of the identified high-quality curricula and materials for science and technology no later than June 30, 2026.

### **School Safety and Behavioral Health Committees**

([H 5165](#), Cotter, House Education)

This bill requires the School Board or committees of cities and towns to establish a Safety and Behavioral Health Committee. It also lays out the representation requirements and committee responsibilities to ensure a stable learning environment for all students.

### **Student Computer Device Privacy**

([H 5176](#), Speakman, House Innovation, Internet & Technology)

This bill prohibits an educational institution or school district from accessing or using location data for tracking a student's institutional device or personal device, except in limited circumstances.

### **Definition of Employee - Labor Relations Act**

([H 5187](#), Corvese, House Labor and S 0124, Ciccone, Senate Labor)

These bills expand the definition of "employee" and also modifies how the State's Labor Relations Board operates and aids in enforcement of the Board's orders.

### **Rule of 90**

([H 5198](#), Fellela, House Finance)

This bill allows teachers, state and municipal employees to retire upon the earlier of reaching age sixty (60) with thirty (30) years of service or the employee's retirement eligibility date under present state statutes.

### **Schools -- Pesticide Control**

([H 5216](#), Carson, House Education)

This bill restricts the application of pesticides and rodenticides at schools and childcare centers and requires schools to provide copies of notice to parents and guardians.

### **ICE Access - School, Libraries and other Facilities**

([H 5225](#), Alzate, House Judiciary)

This bill limits the ability for any federal immigration authority to investigate, detain, apprehend or arrest any individuals for potential violations of federal immigration laws without a judicial warrant within certain protected locations.

### **AFT Local 2012 Bargaining Rights**

([H 5227](#), Edwards, House Labor)

This bill provides protection for the rights of professional, administrative and secretarial employees of the Department of Education to collectively bargain over all terms and conditions of employment.

### **Quality Self-Directed Supports Act of 2025**

([H 5228](#), Shanley, House Labor)

This bill ensures that more developmentally disabled adults can self-direct the care they need and want, by incorporating collective bargaining rights into the self-directed supports program.

### **September 11 Classroom Moment Of Silence**

([H 5251](#), Read, House Education)

This bill allows teachers in all grades to provide the opportunity for students to observe a brief moment of silence on every September 11.

### **Warwick Public Schools' Budget Commission**

([H 5252](#), McNamara, House Education)

The bill creates the Warwick Public Schools' Budget Commission consisting of 5 members to oversee the operations of Warwick Public Schools and to present a preliminary analysis of the school district's financial situation.

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